

**Report to the Saint Paul City Council
on**



**Submitted by
The Department of Planning and Economic
Development
January 13, 2006**

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Report to the City Council on

Mind the Gap: Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness

January 13, 2006

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On November 2, 2005, by Resolution Number 05-1030, the City Council asked PED to respond to the *Mind the Gap* report by gathering additional background data, coordinating input from various advisory bodies and community organizations, developing an initial report with a series of possible action steps and budget options for consideration by the Council and Mayor by December 7, 2005, and providing a comprehensive report and recommendations by January 13, 2006.

In early December, City staff e-mailed a wide range of organizations and individuals asking them to share their ideas on how the City and their organizations could work together to reduce regional race, class, and place disparities. They were also asked to forward the request to any of their constituents who might be interested. To give them some context for the discussion, electronic copies of the Council Resolution and of the matrix of strategies and roles included in the December 7th *Interim Report to the City Council* were attached. This matrix sketched out potential City and partner strategies and roles in redevelopment, economic development, community development, and human development, and is included as **Attachment A** (page 8). This report summarizes the responses received, recent editorial commentary in the local newspapers, and the *Close the Gap* report by the business community. The major findings are:

- **Community Response, Attachment B, (beginning on page 11):** The Planning Commission said that the update of the City's *Comprehensive Plan*, which is now underway, provides a good opportunity for addressing race, class, and space gaps, and the Planning Commission's new Long Range Planning Committee provides a good venue. The Port Authority said that the City needs to preserve industrially-zoned land if it is to continue to provide living wage jobs in the inner city. The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation division feels it has many facilities and services that will be useful in community development strategies to address the problem. The Saint Paul Chamber of Commerce said it was involved in producing the *Close the Gap* report and is heavily involved in reaching out to minority entrepreneurs. The Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board is developing a new workforce center in the Central Corridor and has many programs to help employers in key sectors find employees with the skills they need. The Saint Paul-Ramsey County Department of Public Health said it is reaching out to other public health groups in the region and is seeking to implement the recommendations in the *Close the Gap* report. The Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing felt that the City needed to make citizen participation more inclusive to reduce the threat of gentrification in the Central Corridor, and to build more affordable housing. The West Side Safe Neighborhood Council felt that the City should consider the potential of wireless broadband technology to empower low income residents. And a private citizen suggested that the City provide more supportive services, affordable housing, and homeownership opportunities.
- **Editorial Response, Attachment C, (beginning on page 28):** A *Pioneer Press* editorial called for more funding for early childhood education programs. An article by Dave Beal in the *Pioneer Press* described the business alliance that produced the *Close the Gap* report. A *Star Tribune* editorial proposed six steps to better assimilate minorities. Minnesota Public Radio and Mayor R. T. Ryback both highlighted the fact that large numbers of baby boomers with high skills will be retiring with insufficient qualified younger workers to replace them. The Minnesota Private College Council highlighted its own study that identified the need to upgrade education in order to replace the large number of boomer high skilled jobs that will become available. In an op-ed

article, Mitchell Pearlstein pointed out that the *Mind the Gap* report completely ignored two of the most important causes of race and class disparities – the dramatically higher out of wedlock and arrest rates for some minority residents – and said that reducing disparities requires talking honestly about root causes. Another *Pioneer Press* editorial complained about how the gridlock of partisan politics has kept Minnesota from making the long-term investments that are needed to reduce disparities and remain competitive, and reminded people that this is an election year for all state office holders.

- **Business Response:** The business community has been the driver for both the *Mind the Gap* report (which identified the race, class, and place disparities that threaten our continued economic health), and the *Close the Gap* report (which provided a toolkit of actions individual businesses can take and resources they can access to do their part in reducing disparities). This Report made specific recommendations in income and asset development, housing, un- and underemployment, early childhood education, educational attainment, health care, transportation, and cultural competence and racism. The web address for *Close the Gap* is:
http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2005/10/27_williamsb_disparities/employertoolkit.pdf

II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The responses received to the City's request for feedback, the editorial comments in local publications, and the business-oriented toolkit in the *Close the Gap* report provide many ideas for how to reduce disparities, but in the absence of dialogue among the parties, no consensus exists on appropriate roles and responsibilities for implementing an integrated strategy.
- With the last adopted Economic Development Strategy more than 20 years old, and the last Community Development Agenda more than 10 years old, there is little adopted policy to help develop integrated strategies for reducing race, class, and place disparities.
- Since neither the Coleman administration nor the City Council has yet formed a consensus on the appropriate venue, staff investment, and policy options for addressing race, class, and place disparities, it would be presumptuous for City staff to recommend action steps or budget options as directed in the City Council Resolution.
- Since the greatest success the City has had developing integrated human development, community development, redevelopment, and economic development strategies has been in the revitalization of the Phalen Corridor, staff recommends that the City's response to the *Mind the Gap* report not be another plan or study, but be folded into developing an integrated strategy for the revitalization of the Central Corridor, which has the greatest potential for reducing race, class, and place disparities in the Twin Cities.

III. COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE *MIND THE GAP* REPORT

As of January 13, 2006, City staff have received 9 written comments in response to our solicitation, which are summarized below and included as **Attachment B** (beginning on page 11).

- **Saint Paul Planning Commission, December 30, 2005 (page 11):** The Long Range Planning Committee of the Planning Commission identified several ways in which it is involved in reducing disparities. In addition to planning for LRT and the resulting transit-oriented development, the Planning Commission has developed plans for denser, mixed-income developments that foster job creation. It plays a significant role in citizen participation, which may need to be revamped to better bridge race and class divisions. The newly created Long

Range Planning Committee was formed specifically to pro-actively address emerging trends and issues such as those highlighted in the *Mind the Gap* report. The Planning Commission will explore how the next Comprehensive Plan can better incorporate economic development strategies in planning. The Planning Commission will have a central role in gathering citizen input on transportation development strategies. The Planning Commission could take a more active role in requiring its planning efforts to engage a diverse population. And the Planning Commission is exploring how it can foster regional approaches, possibly in partnership with the Minneapolis City Planning and Zoning Committee.

- **Saint Paul Port Authority, January 10, 2006 (page 14):** The Port Authority's core mission is aligned with reducing disparities by redeveloping brownfields into industrial, commercial, and port facilities that provide living wage jobs in the inner city and East Metro. The Port requires businesses that purchase its land to enter into a 10-year Workforce Agreement that requires them to use their best efforts to hire Saint Paul residents. To help Saint Paul residents compete more effectively for these jobs, the Port provides training customized to the needs of its business customers. A critical issue that will affect the Port's continued ability to generate living wage jobs is preserving and expanding the inventory of appropriately-zoned industrial land. The Port suggests that the City Council ensure that all existing and emerging small area and district plans focus on the preservation of industrially-zoned land, and to consider approving a new industrial zoning classification, as is currently being reviewed by the Planning Commission.
- **Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Services, January 6, 2006 (page 16):** The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission took no official position on the *Mind the Gap* report, but individual Commission members submitted a variety of comments some of which are summarized here. Maintaining and improving Saint Paul parks and recreation centers is a key community development strategy to help make the inner city more attractive to residents who might otherwise locate in suburban communities. The Parks and Recreation division is intimately involved in human development strategies through Community Education programs (in partnership with the Public Schools) and in community recreation activities like "Night Moves." They can play a powerful role in helping diverse residents and new Americans become part of the fabric of the community.
- **Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, December 21, 2005 (page 17):** The Saint Paul Chamber has been very involved in efforts to address race, class, and place disparities for some time. They participated in developing the report described below titled *Close the Gap: a Business Response to our Region's Growing Disparities*, which provided practical suggestions for how employers could make a positive impact on disparity issues. They have also been a leader in helping communities of color achieve economic success. They helped build a coalition of ethnic chambers of commerce, launched the "Gateway" program to help minority-owned businesses become vendors to mid-size companies, helped retain 22 companies representing 1,500 jobs in the Saint Paul/East Metro area, worked closely with the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board, and helped ensure that the Saint Paul/East Metro area continued to have a healthy fiscal climate.
- **Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board, December 16, 2005 (page 19):** The Workforce Investment Board is directly engaged in the task of reducing race, class, and place disparities. It is the result of a merger of the Saint Paul and Ramsey County workforce programs in 2000. It is currently working to consolidate and relocate the Midway and Downtown Workforce Centers into a new location in the Central Corridor, and is exploring the creation of a mobile Workforce Center. To serve the business community, which is one of its primary customers, the WIB has identified six criteria (including wages and growth potential) that have led it to focus on

healthcare, manufacturing, and construction. To serve workers, another key customer, the WIB has targeted the under-utilized talent pool of our immigrant populations. To serve youth, the WIB staffs a Youth Council which oversees programs like the successful *Building Lives* project.

- **Saint Paul-Ramsey County Department of Public Health, January 5, 2006 (page 21):** This group has already begun to address the issues in the *Mind the Gap* report by meeting jointly last December with the two public health advisory groups from Minneapolis and Hennepin County. They recommended that their Department educate their staff about the report, focus on the public health issues with the greatest disparities, and continue training Department staff in cultural competency. They recommended that the City Council and the County Board as large employers implement the recommendations suggested in the *Close the Gap* report. For their own agency they propose focusing its scarce resources on the areas of greatest positive return (like teenage mothers), on support groups that advocate improving health access to children and youth, on coordinated public health programs and legislative initiatives with Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis, and on immigrant health services. They also recommend promoting *Close the Gap* strategies related to health care to Ramsey County employers, restoring full funding to after school programs, promoting wellness programs, implementing a living wage policy that includes health insurance benefits, and supporting affordable and safe childcare.
- **Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAHA), January 2, 2006 (page 24):** MICAHA focused on systemic racism as the underlying issue that needs to be addressed, and then responded to the specific strategies described in the December 7, 2005 document titled *Broad Strategies to Reduce Race, Class, and Place Disparities*. MICAHA suggested that the City needs to find ways for the citizen participation process to reach out to and involve a more diverse population. This will be especially important in the planning and development of the Central Corridor, which has the potential to gentrify diverse residents and businesses out of the neighborhood. MICAHA expressed disappointment that the *Broad Strategies* document ignored the importance of continuing and increasing the City's affordable housing goals for rental and ownership housing.
- **West Side Safe Neighborhood Council, January 3, 2006 (page 26):** This group suggested that the City play a larger role in ensuring that all residents have affordable access to the Internet by facilitating the donation of computers and exploring the possibility of wireless Internet access. Increased Internet access was seen as a way to increase employment, promote business, improve banking practices, hold honest civic dialogues, and improve educational attainment.
- **Jennifer Mateer, December 8, 2005 (page 27):** This respondent felt that the City needed to provide supportive housing resources, more low-income housing options, more training in how to purchase and maintain a home, and better and more affordable public transportation options.

IV. EDITORIAL RESPONSE TO THE *MIND THE GAP* REPORT

An Internet search of editorial comments on the *Mind the Gap* report turned up the following editorials and op-ed articles, which are summarized below and included as **Attachment C** (beginning on page 28).

- ***Focus on the smallest among us*, Editorial, Saint Paul Pioneer Press, Dec. 02, 2005 (page 28):** This editorial focused on the need to increase funding for early education opportunities as a way to reduce race and class disparities.

- ***Alliance works to close economic gap*, Article by Dave Beal, Saint Paul Pioneer Press, November 19, 2005 (page 29):** This article describes the alliance of seven business-oriented organizations (the Itasca Group, the Capital City Partnership, Minneapolis Downtown Council, Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce, St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, Minnesota Business Partnership and the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce) that produced the report *Close the Gap: A Business Response to our Region's Growing Disparities*, which is described below. It provides a "toolkit" for businesses to use to help lower-income households with asset growth, early-childhood education, housing, jobs, health care and transportation.
- ***Closing the gap is not only right, it's smart*, Editorial, Minneapolis Star Tribune, December 16, 2005 (page 31):** This editorial notes that while some of the disparities can be accounted for by the time it takes to assimilate the huge influx of diverse new residents over the past 15 years, the Twin Cities is still not very good at assimilating minorities into the middle class mainstream. While the Twin Cities has less poverty than some other cities, it is more concentrated in the inner cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. The editorial recommended taking six steps to better assimilate minorities. 1. Focus on urban education: make radical changes in the public schools, attack the root causes of nonlearning, which include a culture of victimhood, and enhance their attractiveness to the middle class. 2. Make college and job-training affordable and available. 3. Remove the barriers to central city growth by investing in transit and central city redevelopment to make them more competitive with the suburbs. 4. Encourage business and government to invest in human capital even at the cost of higher taxes. 5. Help stabilize poor families by focusing on public safety, health insurance, and affordable housing. 6. Empower the central cities and engage the suburbs, whose prospects depend upon the health of their inner cities.
- ***Racial, economic disparities threaten region's economic growth*, by Brandt Williams, Minnesota Public Radio Report, October 27, 2005 (page 33):** This radio report summarized the *Mind the Gap* report. The central economic threat is the mismatch between the number jobs that will be vacated as the baby boomers retire over the next decade and the number of people with the skills needed to fill those jobs. The younger workforce is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse than their predecessors, but many are unqualified to replace them. People of color also tend to live farther away from where the new jobs are located, especially lower skilled manufacturing jobs. Low income families need help with affordable housing, food, transportation, and health care. Low-income workers also need help with flexible, short-term, and affordable training programs to help them move up the job ladder. And all of this needs to be done on regional scale.
- ***New Report Explores Disparities, Update from Mayor R. T. Ryback*, November 4, 2005 (page 35):** While the Twin Cities has one of the most highly educated populations in the country, high rates of job and income growth, and one of the lowest poverty rates, it also has the second-largest gap in the nation between poverty in its central cities and poverty in its suburbs. Mayor Ryback, who participated in the *Mind the Gap* report, focuses on the need to find qualified replacements for the baby boomers, many of whom are college educated. Younger workers are increasingly diverse, with lower skill and education levels.
- ***Higher Education Vital to Minnesota's Future*, Minnesota Private Colleges Newsletter, December, 2005 (page 36):** The *Mind the Gap* report reinforces research the Minnesota Private College Council has undertaken on its own that concluded that educational attainment for Minnesota's growing minority population needs to be increased in order to produce the educated workforce necessary to sustain our economic vitality. Because metropolitan areas with high levels of income inequality tend to have

lower levels of overall income growth, the growing race, class, and place disparities are a real threat. In the next four years job growth will begin to outpace Minnesota's production of baccalaureates, and by 2017, the Twin Cities economy will be producing nearly 15,000 more jobs than there are graduates to fill them.

- **'Gap' package left out some key factors, Op-Ed article by Mitch Pearlstein, Minneapolis Star Tribune, December 24, 2005 (page 37):** This article critiqued the *Mind the Gap* report because unless some of the central reasons for race and class disparities are acknowledged, effective strategies cannot be developed to seriously address them. One of the causes of the disparities is the marriage gap, which is not mentioned at all in the report and in press coverage of it. In Hennepin County in 2003, the out-of-wedlock birth rate for white women was almost 16% compared with almost 23% for Asian women, 54% for Hispanic women, 79% for African-American women, and 83% for American Indian women. Another of the causes of the disparities is crime, also omitted from the report, which has a devastating effect on future earnings, marital prospects, and other facets of life. The *African-American Men Project* reported that in 1999, 44% of all African-American men living in Hennepin County between the ages of 18 and 30 had been arrested. While it is right to be concerned that the Twin Cities is the second-most segregated metropolitan area in the nation as measured by income, none of these gaps will be closed until we can honestly address some of their root causes, not just the ones that are comparatively easy and safe to talk about.
- **Assessing the cost of state's deferred maintenance, Editorial, Saint Paul Pioneer Press November 1, 2005 (page 38):** Partisan politics in Minnesota continues to put up roadblocks to making the structural social and economic reforms necessary to maintain its economic strength and quality of life. The *Mind the Gap* report (and other similar recent reports), warning that racial, class and place inequalities can degrade the region merely highlights the need to overcome the State's political gridlock, something the electorate can change this fall when the Governor's office, the entire Legislature, and all state constitutional offices are up for election. The common theme emerging from this research (and research by the Minnesota Private College Research Foundation), is the mismatch between the education and skills of Minnesota's home-grown work force and the skills needed for the jobs that are opening up with the retirement of the baby boom generation. The *Close the Gap* report by the business-led Itasca Project provides practical steps business decision-makers can take without waiting for government. Government needs to engage in big education and economic policy questions, and to stop the endless warring among parties and factions. A broad consensus is emerging about the importance of early childhood education and public transportation, but political gridlock means that only incremental steps can be taken and long-term solutions get deferred. If Minnesota wants to remain a brainpower state with high-wage jobs and competitive businesses, the voters should choose candidates willing to address the deferred maintenance on Minnesota's quality of life that has been studied so well in reports like *Mind the Gap* but neglected by the politicians.

V. BUSINESS RESPONSE TO THE *MIND THE GAP* REPORT

To follow up on the business-led *Mind the Gap* report, the Itasca Project and the Greater Twin Cities United Way formed an alliance with seven business organizations in the Twin Cities (the Capital City Partnership, Minneapolis Downtown Council, Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce, St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, Minnesota Business Partnership and the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce)

to develop a “toolkit” for employers to help them address disparities issues on their own, without waiting on state and local governments to enact the major policy changes that are also needed. A speaker’s bureau is also available. The action steps suggested in the report are summarized below. The whole report, which has links to many other resources on the Internet, is available at this web site:

http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2005/10/27_williamsb_disparities/employertoolkit.pdf

- **Income And Asset Development:** Educate employees about eligibility for state and federal tax credits, promote financial literacy among employees, link them to tax and financial counselors, offer savings plans and Individual Development Accounts, assess pay scales, reach out to minority owned vendors, and support minority entrepreneurs.
- **Housing:** Educate employees about tenants’ rights, offer credit counseling for first time homeowners, partner with nonprofits to rehabilitate or create affordable housing near the workplace, and develop an employer-assisted housing program that offers financial assistance.
- **Unemployment and Underemployment:** Partner with job training programs to help low-income employees succeed, reassess hiring practices, create apprenticeships and internships, develop a mentoring program for minorities, establish minority hiring goals, hire immigrant professionals, reassess hiring policies for job seekers with criminal records.
- **Early Childhood Education:** Offer childcare and referral services for employees, provide childcare benefits, offer flexible work options, directly support and use community childcare programs, offer parenting support groups, support family literacy.
- **Educational Attainment:** Partner with schools by offering financial and management assistance, encourage tutoring at the workplace, offer scholarships to employees and their children in need, offer employees educational help (GED to graduate school), provide internships for high school students, and help employees navigate the education system.
- **Health Care:** Design flexible benefit plans, ensure health insurance providers provide culturally competent services, provide educational and wellness opportunities and incentives for employees, and help connect employees and their families to state and federal health programs.
- **Transportation:** Provide transit benefits, consider transit access in location decisions, operate employee shuttle services to the central city, support reverse commuting, offer variable work hours, coordinate car pools, and help employees get reliable cars.
- **Cultural Barriers and Racism:** Educate employers about cultural differences, secure management commitment for diversity efforts, address racism openly, participate in supplier diversity programs, offer multilingual training, provide onsite English language classes, and create and support employee resource groups.
- **Overarching Strategies:** Create an employee assistance program, direct philanthropy to reduce disparities, commit employee volunteer time to reduce disparities, support public policy changes to reduce disparities, and educate employees about disparities issues.

Attachment A
Broad Strategies to Reduce Race, Class, and Place Disparities

Strategy	Roles and Responsibilities
REDEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES. The process of regenerating less productive or blighted uses or property with more productive uses in order to increase jobs and tax base and remove blighting influences that have a negative impact on property values and/or the quality of life in a community.	
1. Neighborhood redevelopment strategies: This strategy focuses on physically redeveloping blighted, contaminated, and underutilized properties in targeted neighborhoods in railroad, riverfront, and commercial corridors by selectively using the redevelopment powers granted the HRA by state law to acquire, clear, remediate, and convey blighted properties for redevelopment by private developers and businesses. These strategies reduce regional disparities by attracting new jobs to the inner city and by helping inner city housing projects compete more effectively for residents who would otherwise move to the suburbs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public roles: The City and the Port play the lead roles in preparing redevelopment plans with targeted neighborhoods and for implementing them through the limited use of eminent domain and grant and tax increment financing. The City and the Port are the only eligible applicants for state remediation funding, in their own right, or on behalf of private developers. • Nonprofit roles: Community-Based Organizations (like district councils, CDCs, business associations, and other neighborhood groups) are responsible for ensuring that affected residents and businesses have input into the redevelopment plans and for reaching consensus on sometimes difficult development choices. • Private roles: Private developers and businesses are responsible for conceiving of new uses, for investigating the site to determine market feasibility, for acquiring the site when possible, and for risking their own equity to develop and market the site to residential and commercial owners and tenants.
2. Transit oriented development strategies: This long-range strategy focuses on planning for the physical redevelopment of transit corridors into denser mixed use projects in anticipation of the development of Light Rail Transit (LRT), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and commuter rail in designated corridors. It should be noted that these strategies have the potential both to reduce and increase regional place disparities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public roles: The Planning Commission oversees the development of transit-oriented plans for key nodes on the anticipated Central Corridor LRT line. The Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority oversees the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Central Corridor and the study for developing Union Station into a multi-modal transit hub. • Nonprofit roles: CBOs in the Central Corridor and near Union Station are engaged in the planning effort. • Private roles: The Saint Paul and Midway Chambers of Commerce are involved in the planning efforts, as are some business associations in the Central Corridor.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES. The process of increasing community wealth, reducing poverty, and enhancing individual economic opportunities when a community makes itself ready to accommodate the retention, startup, location, or expansion of an enterprise.	
3. Business attraction strategies: This strategy uses government incentives to attract owners and tenants to vacant or newly-developed real estate in order to create construction jobs and increase jobs and tax base. Most incentives come with requirements that are intended to ensure that prevailing or living wages are paid, that Saint Paul residents are among those hired, and that high value buildings are constructed. Some incentives are targeted at specific business sectors, like the emerging bioscience sector. This is intended to reduce disparities by increasing inner city employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public roles: The Port authority provides cheap land in its business centers for advanced manufacturing enterprises. The City provides subsidized space in its Bioscience Incubator and the state provides tax credits for bioscience firms in the Bioscience Zone. The City provides grants, forgivable loans, or tax increment financing for important economic development projects. • Nonprofit roles: Organizations like the Riverfront Corporation and the Capital City Partnership seek to attract business and office tenants to the downtown. The RiverCentre Convention and Visitors Authority seeks to grow the hospitality and visitor sector. CDCs also operate at the neighborhood level with the intention of meeting similar goals. • Private roles: The St. Paul Chamber seeks to attract businesses to the east metro, the Building Owners and Managers Association seeks to attract tenants to commercial office buildings, and various trade associations seek to grow their individual sectors.

Strategy	Roles and Responsibilities
<p>4. Targeted business development strategies: This strategy is intended to help various targeted businesses (minority and women owned and small businesses) compete effectively for public contracts by certifying targeted vendors and soliciting them to bid on public contracts by centralizing the public bidding process. These strategies reduce race and class disparities by creating employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for minority and female entrepreneurs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public roles: The City and County Vendor Development Program helps targeted vendors (women and minority owned, and small businesses) compete for public contracting opportunities. PED's Minority Business Development and Retention Program funds a network of nonprofit agencies that provide services to women- and minority-owned businesses. • Nonprofit roles: PED contracts with about a dozen nonprofit organizations to provide business development services to targeted women- and minority-owned businesses. • Private roles: With funding from PED, the Minnesota Ethnic Chamber Coalition has been formed to help develop regional ethnic entrepreneurs. And the private sector's Minnesota Minority Supplier Diversity Council helps targeted vendors compete for private contracting opportunities.
<p>5. Community economic development strategies: This strategy is intended to foster the formation and growth of businesses owned by minorities and women by encouraging minority homeownership and by providing technical assistance, business education, and micro-enterprise financing. These strategies also reduce race and class disparities by creating employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for minority and female entrepreneurs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public roles: The City's role has been, through the Minority Business Development and Retention Program, to fund nonprofit community-based organizations that organize or provide technical assistance to minority entrepreneurs. In its redevelopment role, the HRA has also helped finance some important ethnic businesses and some business incubators for minority entrepreneurs developed by its nonprofit partners. • Nonprofit roles: The MBDR Program contracts with more than a dozen community-based organizations that play the lead role in community economic development, including the Neighborhood Development Center, WomenVenture, and the Metropolitan Economic Development Association. • Private roles: With funding from PED, the Minnesota Ethnic Chamber Coalition has been formed to help develop regional ethnic entrepreneurs.
<p>COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES. The process by which a community sustains a location for the benefit and well-being of its residents by conserving the environment and natural resources and promoting a richer cultural life.</p>	
<p>6. Citizen participation and empowerment strategies: This strategy is intended to foster citizen input into the planning process, and where the capacity exists, to empower community organizations to develop projects in their own neighborhoods, some of which are so large that they require coalitions of organizations from several neighborhoods. These strategies help reduce disparities by encouraging broad citizen participation in developing long-term plans for revitalizing the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public roles: The City staffs a variety of citizen commissions, committees, and advisory boards with important responsibilities in many areas of City life. The City also funds District Planning Councils, solicits their input on land use, licensing, and permitting processes, and encourages them to develop district and small area plans, summaries of which become part of the <i>Comprehensive Plan</i>. The City also provides project and administrative funding to community development corporations which identify and develop important community housing and commercial projects. • Nonprofit roles: Community-based nonprofit organizations play the lead role in identifying and implementing community revitalization and redevelopment strategies. Some of these are for projects so large (the Phalen Corridor, for example) that they require coalitions of public, nonprofit, and private groups from several neighborhoods. • Private roles: Private citizens serve on commissions and committees that make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on important community development and funding matters, including the Planning Commission, the Sales Tax Revitalization Board, and the Capital Improvement Budget Committee.

Strategy	Roles and Responsibilities
<p>7. Transportation development strategies: This strategy is intended to foster citizen input into the long-term planning process for developing public transportation alternatives including light rail, commuter rail, and multimodal transportation hubs. As noted in #2 above, these have the potential to both increase and decrease place disparities. Without adequate funding for the existing public transit system, there seem to be few strategies about how to increase access to suburban jobs for inner city residents, and fewer strategies for reducing the need for public transportation, by developing more affordable housing in the suburbs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public roles: The Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority is the lead public agency in convening community task forces to plan for the development of light rail and commuter rail in Ramsey County. The Port Authority and the City are the lead agencies in planning for the redevelopment of Union Depot into a multi modal transportation hub and the redevelopment of the Post Office when it vacates its building by 2010. • Nonprofit roles: Some nonprofit organizations like University UNITED are significantly involved in planning for the Central Corridor LRT. • Private roles: The Midway Chamber of Commerce is the lead private sector agency involved in Central Corridor LRT planning.
<p>HUMAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES.</p>	
<p>The process by which a community promotes human well-being by ensuring and enlarging human choices which lead to equality of opportunities for all people in society and the empowerment of people so that they participate in - and benefit from - the development process.</p>	
<p>8. Public education strategies: This strategy is intended to provide all children with the opportunity to develop as far as their abilities allow, and to help integrate increasingly diverse populations into the cultural life and economy of the region by providing schooling from kindergarten through high school. Since most race, class, and place disparities ultimately derive from differences in income and wealth, and since this relates so directly with educational attainment, this may be the key strategy for reducing disparities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public roles: The lead agency in developing and implementing this strategy is the Saint Paul Public School system, directed by its school board. The City has helped finance development of several charter schools, and played a supportive role recently in sponsoring a volunteer program. And for the last few years the federal government has been pushing for improvement through its No Child Left Behind program. • Nonprofit roles: Several nonprofit groups have emerged to sponsor charter schools as well as public school support initiatives. • Private roles: Private sector involvement in public education strategies is limited.
<p>9. Workforce Development strategies: This strategy uses state and federal workforce development funding to help develop workers with the skills needed by Ramsey County employers and to help retrain dislocated workers for new positions. This is a potentially powerful tool to reduce disparities, especially as detailed labor market data identifies positions for which an aging workforce will need to identify and train replacement workers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public roles: Ramsey County's Workforce Solutions is the lead public agency for developing and implementing broad workforce development strategies under the direction of its county-wide Workforce Investment Board. To help their employers find qualified workers and to increase the number of local residents hired, the Saint Paul Port Authority operates its own workforce development program called <i>Employer Solutions</i>. Through its MBDR Program, the City has investigated developing an Apprenticeship Opportunity Program to help female and minority apprentices fill anticipated retirements in the labor trades. • Nonprofit roles: Much of the roughly \$20 million in federal and state workforce development funding flows through a network of nonprofit educational, social service, and employment counseling organizations. • Private roles: By federal law, 51% of the Workforce Investment Board must be private sector representatives.

**Attachment B
Community Response**

PLANNING COMMISSION

George Johnson, Chair



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
Randy C. Kelly, Mayor

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Facsimile: 651-228-3220*

December 30, 2005

Craig Blakely
Department of Planning and Economic Development
25 West Fourth Street, CHA 1300
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Mr. Blakely,

The Planning Commission has reviewed the Brookings Institution report titled *Mind the Gap: Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities* and your analysis of broad strategies to reduce disparities, requested by the City Council on November 2, 2005. The attached comments were prepared in response to your analysis and to the report itself, and are intended to propose strategies that the Planning Commission could employ to reduce the race, class, and place disparities identified in the report.

Please keep the Planning Commission informed as your work on this important topic continues, and let me know if we can provide you with additional input or information. We hope that the Planning Commission will be involved in the City Council's policy discussion, and we would like to see a copy of your final report to the City Council.

Sincerely,

George Johnson
Chair, Planning Commission

AA-ADA-EEO EMPLOYER

Long-range Planning Committee
Saint Paul Planning Commission
Broad Strategies to Reduce Race, Class, and Place Disparities

The Long-range Planning Committee of the Saint Paul Planning Commission has formulated the following comments on the Planning Commission's role in responding to the Brookings Institution report titled "*Mind the Gap: Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities.*"

These comments elaborate and expand on the role of the Planning Commission as described in PED's "Broad Strategies to Reduce Race, Class, and Place Disparities" (December 7, 2005).

Planning for reduced disparities

Transit-oriented development is not the only kind of planning that the Planning Commission does that can help reduce the disparities highlighted by the *Mind the Gap* report. Plans developed and approved by the Planning Commission for areas that are not proximate to transit can also call for:

- more-dense development,
- development that fosters job creation,
- mixed-income housing developments that can decrease concentrated poverty, and
- better transportation to decrease negative impacts of place disparities.

Citizen participation

If citizen participation is essential to community development, the Planning Commission plays multiple roles in achieving this goal. The Planning Commission is composed of private citizens, and is dedicated to considering public input as it prepares plans (from small area plans to the Comprehensive Plan) and deliberates on its decisions. District Councils are the locus of much of Saint Paul's citizen participation, but the existing structure for citizen participation may need to be revamped in order to adequately involve and address the racial and class issues that emerge from the *Mind the Gap* report. The Planning Commission should be a leader in trying to reach out to Saint Paul's minority and immigrant populations

Long-range Planning Committee

The newly created Long-range Planning Committee of the Planning Commission is charged with providing leadership to the Planning Commission on long-range issues that might be missed in day-to-day operations. The Committee is intended to deal with emerging trends like those discussed in the *Mind the Gap* report (increasing diversity, income gaps, etc.) directly and proactively rather than indirectly and reactively.

Economic development

The Planning Commission has not been a leader in directing economic development policy in the city for many years, but the *Mind the Gap* report highlights a need to connect economic development with the kind of physical development that the Planning Commission oversees.

Preparation of the city's next Comprehensive Plan provides a perfect opportunity to discuss how to incorporate economic development strategies and practices in planning.

Transportation

The Planning Commission should also have a lead role in transportation development strategies. As light-rail transit in Saint Paul becomes a reality, the Planning Commission will have many opportunities to deal directly with transportation development and should have a clear, central role in gathering citizen input.

Diversity

As diversity in Saint Paul becomes a clear demographic reality, the Planning Commission could take a more head-on approach to diversity. This new approach could include requiring small area plans and the Comprehensive Plan to demonstrably engage a diverse population, or to directly address diversity issues along with more traditional areas of planning concern.

Regional role

One strategy for reducing disparities described in the *Mind the Gap* report is to “operationalize regionalism.” This goal is extremely important, but progress will be slow and will require extensive partnerships and cooperation. Even though Saint Paul is only one city in a region of hundreds, its central city identity means that there is potential for the city and the Planning Commission to do more to foster regionalism, perhaps in tandem w/ Minneapolis' City Planning and Zoning Committee or with planning commissions from suburban Ramsey County communities.

From: "Lorrie Louder" <ljl@sppa.com>
To: <Craig.Blakely@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Date: 1/10/2006 10:30:37 AM
Subject: MIND THE GAP REPORT

The Saint Paul Port Authority is intimately involved in reducing the disparities identified in the Mind the Gap report. Its core mission is providing living wage jobs in primarily the industrial and commercial sector, throughout the City of Saint Paul and in Metro East. In the past two-plus decades, the Port has redeveloped almost 1,400 acres of land into 18 business centers and four river shipping terminals, which since 1996 have added or retained more than 24,000 living-wage jobs and tens of millions of dollars to the Saint Paul tax base.

The Port also requires the businesses that purchase land in its business centers to hire Saint Paul residents pursuant to a 10-year Workforce Agreement that establishes specific annual job creation production requirements. And to ensure that Saint Paul residents can effectively compete for these new jobs, the Port also provides training customized to the needs of the employers.

But the Port is hampered in its mission by the loss of appropriately-zoned industrial land, through formal rezoning for residential or other development. There is very strong neighborhood and community feeling that the Port Authority should continue to redevelop areas such as the auto salvage area along Interstate 35-E at Maryland into more neighborhood-friendly land uses. This area and others will be redeveloped with high-tech manufacturing and commercial activities that provide a substantial number of jobs for areas residents, as well as wages that pay at least \$10.50 per hour for entry level production workers. The Port Authority's recent production over the past five years has shown wage levels provided by its customers that have built new facilities in its business centers to be on average \$14.45 per hour. All of these redevelopment activities undertaken by the Port Authority have as their fundamental base a very focused effort in remediating pollution from these brownfields, and bringing these properties up to a marketable status.

The Port Authority suggests that, in looking at strategies to address regional race, class, and place disparities, that the Saint Paul City Council consider ways in which it can support the preservation and expansion of industrial land. One method to accomplish this is to encourage and ensure that all existing and emerging small-area and district plans focus on the preservation of industrial zoned areas that can be redeveloped into job-producing business centers that pay wages at the levels that have been achieved by the Port Authority in its business centers to date. Another potential is to approve the new industrial zoning classification currently being considered by the public and the Planning Commission

DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
RECREATION SERVICES



CITY OF SAINT PAUL

Christopher B. Coleman, Mayor



Bob Bierscheid, CPRP
Director



300 City Hall Annex
25 West Fourth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102
www.ci.stpaul.mn.us/depts/parks

Telephone: 651-266-6400
Facsimile: 651-292-7405
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"Saint Paul Parks and Recreation- Creating Community Through People, Parks and Programs"

MEMO

January 18, 2006

To: Craig Blakely
From: Bob Bierscheid, CPRP
Re: Mind the Gap Report

The following are individual comments of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commissioners on the Mind the Gap Report. They were submitted individually and not part of any Commission action.

- Particularly likes the concept that there is some size park within walking distance of every home in St. Paul. Although this may be more a vision than an actuality, it certainly should be included somewhere -- plus the large regional park complexes that are very attractive to families, businesses and drive the whole concept of community.
- There should also be a mention of the 41 recreation centers and the recreation programs. I think this would all fit within the Human Development Strategies -- and if the lead agency is the Saint Paul Public Schools, I think the Parks and Recreation Department should be a close second.
- Major effort should continued to be put forth to make sure new immigrants are made to feel comfortable in the community. We should make sure there are activities that the new arrivals will want to be involved in the community.
- Community should provide activities that help develop the self worth of individuals including programs like "Night Moves."
- The community needs to resolve the conflict between providing programs that represent the existing culture of new arrivals and the issue of assimilation into society. Individuals do not have to lose cultural identity will still becoming part of fabric of the community.
- Concern on point #4 that people/companies should get contracts/work based on their ability to do the job for the most advantageous price. Not because of their sex, color or creed. Simply, it is unfair for one person to be favored over another because he/she may be a different color.
- Another concern has to do with transit oriented development. Agrees that it is important to explore these plans, still not convinced Light Rail/Bus Rapid is the best way to spend our tax dollars to help people get around the cities although this is probably a broader subject than you are looking to address now.



SAINT PAUL AREA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Chamber of Commerce Center
401 North Robert Street
Suite 150
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101

Suburban Business Center
1935 West County Road B2
Suite 241
Roseville, Minnesota 55113

Phone: 651.223.5000
Fax: 651.223.5119

YOUR
BUSINESS
ADVOCATE

December 21, 2005

Craig Blakely
Department of Planning and Economic Development (PED)
City of Saint Paul
1400 City Hall Annex, 25 West Fourth Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Craig:

On behalf of the Saint Paul City Council you requested information on the perspective of the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce in relation to the recently completed "Mind the Gap" report on racial disparities in our region.

The Chamber takes the issues discussed in the report seriously and in fact co-hosted an event for the business community in November to hear about what the private sector can do to address the growing disparities. We advised on the creation of a toolkit for businesses to use in increasing opportunities for people of color as employees, customers and stakeholders.

In addition our ongoing programs in economic and workforce development are continually working to provide increased opportunities for communities of color to grow and succeed in the Saint Paul/East Metro area economy. Some specific actions that we are engaged in include:

- Helped build a coalition of ethnic Chambers of Commerce representing nearly 700 minority businesses to provide streamlined access for businesses looking to reach the ethnic market
- Launched the "Gateway" program designed to give minority owned businesses access to mid-size companies for the purpose of selling goods and services
- Helped retain or expand 22 companies and more than 1500 jobs in our community this year either alone or with our economic development partners which provides employment opportunities for people of color

s a i n t p a u l c h a m b e r . c o m

- Conducted more than 60 business retention visits to companies in the region to thank them for creating jobs and tax base and to understand what resources we can provide to help them continue to be successful in this marketplace
- Work closely with the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to ensure that public sector workforce and training resources are used most effectively, specifically targeting English language learners and providing training for emerging industries
- Ensure that the Saint Paul/East Metro area continues to have a healthy fiscal climate for business thereby ensuring that job creation continues and opportunities for people of color expand

Going forward, the Chamber remains committed to recruiting key growth industries (such as bioscience and insurance), retaining existing employers who provide the greatest opportunity for job creation, maintaining a pro-business climate, encouraging international trade and investment, and promoting the Saint Paul/East Metro area as a great location for business.

As we stay focused on our success in retaining existing employers and encouraging trade and investment, we appreciate our partnership with the City of Saint Paul and look forward to working together to further the economic well-being of all Saint Paul stakeholders, both residents and businesses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Larry Dowell', written over a horizontal line.

Larry Dowell
President

Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board

Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board
Chamber of Commerce Center
401 North Robert Street
Suite 150
St. Paul, MN 55101

December 16, 2005

Mr. Craig Blakely
Department of Planning and Economic Development (PED)
1400 City Hall Annex, 25 West Fourth Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Mr. Blakely;

I submit the following in response to an email forwarded to me by Patricia Brady of Workforce Solutions that invited the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board to share ideas on how the City and its partners can work together to reduce the regional disparities identified in the *Mind the Gap* report.

The Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board (RCWIB) was established as a workforce development leader that engages and brings stakeholders together in collaborative initiatives.

The RCWIB was created under a Joint Powers Agreement between the City of St. Paul and Ramsey County in 2000, which outlined the responsibility, composition and member selection criteria for the RCWIB. The Joint Powers Agreement specifically requires: “50 percent of each category of members shall be appointed by the Mayor, according to the City’s Policy Concerning Citizen Committees...” Due to this requirement, the WIB is in position to work with the City and its partners on the issues identified in the *Mind the Gap* report as it relates to workforce concerns.

The RCWIB looks to be supportive and involved in future strategies that aid in the reduction of race, class, and place disparities, which will in turn promote economic success of Ramsey County. As the RCWIB continues to serve Ramsey County, their 2006 goals are set to work towards the reduction of race, class and place disparities by focusing on the development of the vision for the Ramsey County Workforce Centers, the continuation of making the public workforce system more demand driven and effective and by exploring avenues to access funding to support the Ramsey County WIB objectives.

As the RCWIB continues on the path of completing the consolidation/relocation of the Midway and Downtown WorkForce Centers it keeps in mind the importance of locating the new WorkForce center in a place that best serves the people of Ramsey County. This site will be in the City of St. Paul, in an area of high need and on a major bus route, giving those with transportation challenges the best opportunity to receive needed employment services.

The RCWIB is also exploring the option of implementing the services of a mobile workforce center in Ramsey County. This provides many opportunities to assist those with the greatest needs by going to neighborhoods where even the option of taking public transportation is a challenge.

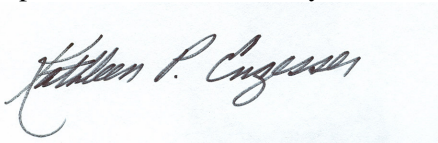
As the RCWIB continues to focus on business as a primary customer it allows the organization to provide more strategic direction to how jobs are made available to the residents of Ramsey County. Priority industries were defined by the WIB based on the following six criteria: (1) strong future employment prospects; (2) large, distinguishing industry; (3) compensation above average; (4) fits community economic development priorities; (5) imports capital into community (rather than recycling); and (6) hires local pool of workers. Targeting on healthcare, manufacturing and construction, the RCWIB focuses on jobs with the most opportunities for the potential workforce in the area. Healthcare, as one of the priorities, provides an important opportunity. Over the last few years, healthcare represents one of the few industries that added jobs and even experienced workforce shortages.

A growing and under tapped talent pool in our community is the immigrant population. As there is an increasing need to look to previously under-utilized labor pools--groups that have traditionally faced impediments to full employment such as people with limited English language, the RCWIB will use its new nonprofit status to locate funds to increase ELL services to those who are employed or are having challenges with becoming employed due to language restrictions.

The RCWIB Youth Council provides oversight to youth services through Workforce Solutions. An interest of the Youth Council is to utilize the new 501(c) (3) status to fund youth programs including the successful pilot project, Building Lives. This project worked to build the long-term success of young offenders through a youth-centered, community supported, culturally effective approach that helped the youth build solid skills and expand their options for high paying long-term employment and personal and community success. Providing needed dollars to programs that promote a positive lifestyle and work habits to our youth is a constructive step towards bridging the poverty gap.

By increasing the efficiency of the WIB processes and administration, it allows the WIB to focus more on the goals and aspirations of the Board in helping the residents of Ramsey County.

The RCWIB looks forward to working with the City of Saint Paul and its partners on the reduction of disparities in our community.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kathleen P. Engesser", written in dark ink on a light blue background.

Kathy Engesser, Chair
Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board



**Saint Paul - Ramsey County
Department of Public Health**

Rob Fulton, Director

50 W. Kellogg Blvd., Ste. 930
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102
651-266-2400

January 5, 2006

To: Chris Coleman, Mayor
Saint Paul City Council Members
Ramsey County Board of Commissioners

Fr: Mary A. Ackerman, Chair CHSAC

In early December, members of the Saint Paul-Ramsey County Community Health Services Advisory Committee (CHSAC) made history. We met with the two public health advisory groups from Minneapolis and Hennepin County. Everyone agreed that the joint meeting was long overdue since the issues of urban health demand we collaborate to create solutions that can truly carry us into a healthy future.

The Itasca Project's final report, "Mind the Gap", was our convening topic. I have served on CHSAC for several years and now Chair this group. I can honestly say that few subjects have energized our Advisory Committee as this report has. In our January 4th meeting we all agreed that the issues raised in "Mind the Gap" -- race, class and place disparities -- would be our filter for all future topics in 2006. I will be surprised if the report is not the filter for work long after 2006. As of this writing, I anticipate that the urban health advisory boards will reconvene in the fall of 2006 to see if progress has been made on any of the issues raised in the report.

Attached please find the recommendations for action your Saint Paul-Ramsey County Community Health Services Advisory Committee has drafted for you. We urge you to support our recommendations and stand ready to do our part with you to 'close the gap' in our communities.

Please feel free to contact any of the 22 members of the Advisory Committee if you have questions or concerns. We would value the dialog.

Cc: David Twa, County Manager
Rob Fulton, Director, Public Health

**A RESPONSE TO “MIND THE GAP”
FROM THE SAINT PAUL – RAMSEY COUNTY
COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Saint Paul – Ramsey County Community Health Services Advisory Committee (CHSAC) advises the Mayor, City Council and County Board on issues related to public health as defined in the Joint Powers Agreement approved by both local governments in December, 1996. The Saint Paul – Ramsey County Department of Public Health (Department) provides staff support to the CHSAC.

On December 7, 2005, the CHSAC, along with public health advisory groups from Minneapolis and Hennepin County, convened a meeting to investigate urban health issues. The joint meeting attendees heard a presentation from Donna Zimmerman, Vice President of Health Partners and spokesperson for the Itasca Project, on the report entitled: “Mind the Gap – Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities”. The Itasca Project, a collaboration of more than 40 area CEOs, mayors and university leaders, had the foresight to recognize race, class and place disparities as a key concern to the region’s competitiveness. Attendees received copies of the report as well as the publication entitled “Close the Gap”, which provides strategies employers can implement to close the disparities gap.

Saint Paul and Ramsey County have a number of health assets that work toward reducing the disparities gap. The assets include: access to health care supported by local tax dollars; Block Grant funding of four community clinics; provision of services to indigent residents of Ramsey County provided at Regions Hospital; excellent response times by local emergency medical service providers; and special services, including family planning, immunizations, and infectious disease control provided by the Department. The City and County also have an excellent array of health clinics that provide services in several languages to serve a large non-English speaking population.

However, within Ramsey County, disparities in health outcomes due to race, class, and place continue to exist. Examples include:

- Infant mortality rates are triple for African-American and quadruple for Native Americans as compared to Caucasians;
- High School graduation rates are significantly lower for teenage mothers;
- Lead poisoning is far more common among families living in older homes; and
- Asthma rates are significantly higher for persons living along heavily traveled interstate highways

Recognizing the fact that the health of individuals and families living in Saint Paul and Ramsey County is adversely impacted due to disparities in race, class and place, the CHSAC makes the following recommendations to the Department:

1. Disseminate the report, “Mind the Gap” to all staff of the Department and provide informational presentations and training where appropriate.
2. Focus on issues of public health with the greatest disparities when setting priorities.
3. Continue to provide training to Department staff on cultural competency and anti-racism.

The CHSAC makes the following recommendations to the City Council and the County Board.

1. Recommend to the City and County, as large employers, that the “Close the Gap – Business Response to Region’s Growing Disparities” strategies be modeled.
2. Focus on areas of greatest positive return on investment such as teenage mothers, early childhood family education, after school (Second-shift) programming, and infectious disease reduction and control.
3. Support advocacy groups such as the Children’s Defense Fund and the Cover All Kids Coalition in their efforts to improve healthcare access to all children and youth.
4. Coordinate public health programs and legislative initiatives with Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis where appropriate.
5. Continue support for immigrant health services across the City and County.
6. Disseminate and promote Close the Gap strategy information to employers within Ramsey County, specifically related to healthcare.
7. Restore full funding to after school programs.
8. Promote active living and wellness programs throughout the County.
9. Implement a living wage policy that includes health insurance benefits.
10. Support affordable and safe childcare.

From: Arthur Pry <apry@earthlink.net>
To: <craig.blakely@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Date: 1/2/2006 11:31:06 AM
Subject: Mind the Gap response

Mind the Gap Response:

We are grateful for the work of the Itasca Project in generating the Brookings Institution report, "Mind the Gap: Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities", and to the St. Paul City Council for its resolution calling for a response from a wide group of organizations in the city. As an organization of faith based communities working on affordable housing issues, MICAHA (Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing) is happy to submit this response.

While the report is aimed at "economic competitiveness", it acknowledges the issue is larger than that. This underlying issue, not named but present like the elephant in the room, is systemic racism. We will not adequately address the race, class and place disparities if we approach the task as though we are a "color blind" region. The documentation of the Gap demonstrates how inadequate our current mode of doing business is because the disparities are increasing and with predicted demographic changes will only become worse.

As a community based organization, our response is directed to Community Development Strategies, specifically to #6, #1 and #2 in PED's "Broad Strategies..." document.

#6 - "Citizen participation and empowerment strategies."

As the city pioneered the development of District Planning Councils to solicit community input into the planning process, now it must use its creative imagination to harness diversity and creativity of citizens not represented adequately by these councils.

If the city is serious about "minding the gap", then targeted goals aimed at reducing race, class and place disparities and the means of accountability must be built into the city's strategies. This is especially true for policies and planning that directly affect people and neighborhoods of color. Since the region already has many strengths documented in the report and still we face disturbing and growing disparities, it cannot be assumed that adding to these strengths will also adequately address the distribution of these social goods to those left out or left behind.

Therefore, the city must involve the latter in addressing these problems and finding solutions. It is not enough to develop a model and invite all people to participate. It will be important to include diverse groups in developing the model that works for reaching out and involving all stake holders. The city must become proactive in this process.

#'s 1 & 2 - "Neighborhood redevelopment strategies and Transit oriented development strategies."

This is a particular application of #6 above. The "Broad strategies" document places responsibility on Community Based Organizations "for insuring that affected residents and businesses have input into the redevelopment plans..." MICAH thinks this responsibility for diverse citizen input lies with the city of St. Paul.

Particularly in regard to the proposed Central Corridor LRT, it is critical to avoid even a diminished "Rondo" by displacing current residents and relegating them to some other place by redevelopment that prices them out of their homes. Citizens along the corridor are vital stake holders who must have a place at the table. Because responsibilities for the Central Corridor are divided among Metropolitan Council, Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul it is easy for community groups to be left out. The city of St. Paul is responsible for their inclusion.

Finally, we were surprised and disappointed that the "Broad Strategies" document ignored the importance of continuing and even increasing the city's goal of at least 20% affordability at 30% and 50% AMI for new housing units built in St. Paul. Providing affordable housing is critical to "minding the gap" since a safe, decent, affordable place to live is vital to family stability and development and home ownership appears to be a chief engine of personal wealth.

Respectfully submitted by,
Arthur Pry, MICAH's representative to the Housing 5000 Advisory Task Force and
John Buzza, MICAH staff organizer for MICAH Ramsey County

Arthur M. Pry
1809 Stanford Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55105-2043
(651) 696-1798

From: "Jocelyn" <jocelynsue@msn.com>
To: <craig.blakely@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Date: 1/3/2006 2:32:53 PM
Subject: Mind the GAP

I meant to send this sooner but I wanted you to know that we do have a problem with those with the internet and those without, typically folks in poverty. As a Crime Prevention Coordinator for St Paul's West Side, I see first hand how critical getting quick updates about topics of safety is for all of our residents but unfortunately only those with means typically have computers or access to the internet. Other cities have created a free or low-cost internet access and/or wi-fi options. We should also try to get computers donated at clearing houses such as our District Councils, either by residents upgrading or corporations.

Access to jobs and information via the internet should also help to level the playing field, in addition to promoting stronger business ties, providing stronger training programs, holding honest civic dialogues on the topic of race, better banking practices and hold higher standards in all of our St Paul schools.

This is just a quick summary of many thoughts but I wanted to be sure to get you at least some feedback. Please keep us posted on your progress with this very important topic. - Jocelyn

Jocelyn van Toor

West Side Safe Neighborhood Council

209 W Page St

St Paul, MN 55107

651.298.9727

www.westsidesafe.org

From: "JENNIFER MATEER" <j.mateer@worldnet.att.net>
To: <craig.blakely@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Date: 12/8/2005 5:21:16 PM

Mr. Blakely - I have reviewed the Mind the Gap issues. I would like to encourage the city to include development of supported housing options and other low income housing options. In addition, opportunities for homeownership which may include training on how to be a responsible home owner (yard and home upkeep, responsibility to keep lawn and house in good condition, snow removal responsibilities, etc.). I am also interested and advocate the development and use of affordable public transportation. Thanks.

Attachment C Editorial Response

Saint Paul Pioneer Press Editorial

Dec. 02, 2005

Focus on the smallest among us

We'll say it again. And again. Children absolutely and positively need high-quality daytime care while their parents are at work. Why?

The kids who are the most academically, emotionally and behaviorally prepared for kindergarten arrive there from child care programs that teach rather than baby-sit. Yet in Minnesota and Wisconsin, few children receive what they need and crave, mostly because the effective programs cost more.

An evaluation by Child Trends, a nonpartisan research organization, shows that nearly all of Minnesota's 3- to 5-year-old children attend licensed child care centers that meet minimal thresholds for excellence. Only 25 percent were rated "good." Four percent were below minimal standards. The remainder of the centers fall into a vast middle ground of mediocrity. The children are safe, yes. They're fed and protected. But their caregivers are not trained to help them develop academically and emotionally.

A comparison to a Wisconsin study of a year ago isn't perfect, but it does give a snapshot of the overall quality of child care in that state. In December the Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership and the University of Wisconsin released rankings of 1,392 child care settings. Forty-six percent were ranked as "mediocre" in quality. Only 5 percent were ranked as superior; 23 percent were above average. The study was the foundation of an initiative by Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle to rank child care centers on the basis of quality, and provide monetary awards to the best centers. The proposal was defeated along party lines.

It's not like any of this should come as news. Fed economist Art Rolnick has shown us the return on investing in early education. The drumbeat about quality early childhood programs has sounded from pulpits and podiums across the state. Archbishop Harry Flynn and Lutheran Bishop Peter Rogness focused on quality early education programs in their "Focus on Poverty" tour early this year. Educators, business owners and elected officials in the Itasca Project developed the "Mind the Gap" report that advocated for an improvement in early childhood programs. Several Itasca members, joined by members of Greater Twin Cities United Way, produced "Close the Gap: A Business Response to our Region's Growing Disparities." There, too, quality early childhood education was emphasized. University of Minnesota President Robert Bruininks, long an advocate for high-quality early childhood programs, heads Itasca's early childhood task force.

Yet in the next breath, someone will scream about that pesky achievement gap between white and minority children. Why is the state and its public education system failing its kids of color? Young children in the care of trained child care teachers who hold college degrees in early childhood education learn more. Child care programs that include professional curricula teach more. What appears to be play can double as an enriching academic exercise, if the right people are in charge. And yes, childcare centers with trained professionals do cost more.

The Ready4K child advocacy group is working toward a rating system now that informs parents of the quality of programs. The Ready4K plan could recommend that parents who pay the child care sliding fee would pay less if they chose a high-quality child care program. Or the group may recommend that the state advocate for higher federal child care tax credits that would benefit middle-income families.

Does Minnesota really want to close the achievement gap? A part of that solution surfaces only if the smallest learners get the help they deserve.

November 19, 2005

Alliance works to close economic gap

By Dave Beal

In what some of its members are calling a first-ever alliance, seven of Minnesota's most influential business organizations have joined forces to curb growing economic disparities in the Twin Cities area.

Practical concerns about competitiveness of the area's work force helped draw them together.

The coalition has developed a "tool kit" to steer lower-income households to places they can find assistance with critical concerns. These issues range from asset growth and early-childhood education to housing, jobs, health care and transportation.

The group is pushing hard to get employers to bring the tool kit to the attention of their workers. The alliance began distributing it to employers at a breakfast Wednesday. Supporters hope to get as many as 500 employers engaged in the process.

The initiative is working with data contained in a new report prepared for the alliance by the Brookings Institution, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank. Brookings just released the report, "Mind the Gap: Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities."

The project's leaders, the Greater Twin Cities United Way and the Itasca Group, have followed up with their own report — "Close the Gap: A Business Response to our Region's Growing Disparities." The tool kit is part of that report.

The tool kit attempts to focus more attention on underused resources. A prime example: the earned income tax credit, a federal tax break that helps low-income households.

The effort also includes formation of a speakers bureau to "spread the word of the potential impact of socio-economic disparities and actions to reduce them," according to the alliance.

The alliance, working with the Wilder Foundation in St. Paul, also wants to set up a monitoring system to measure progress in reducing disparities.

"In some ways, I view this as the beginning," says Jim Campbell, the retired Wells Fargo executive who is now interim dean of the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management. Campbell also is chairman of the Itasca Group, a consortium of Minnesota CEOs formed in 2003 to push for more metrowide cooperation on community concerns.

Economic circumstances are worsening for many at the bottom of the economic scale, Campbell says. "The gap is widening. This has a lot to do with work force readiness. We'll need thousands and thousands of new employees coming into the workplace. If they aren't provided the basics, we're not going to end up with the work force we need."

Mary Brainerd, CEO at HealthPartners and chair of the Itasca's disparities initiative, says that for now the alliance is not pushing for legislative changes.

"We think there are a lot of positive things that can happen outside of the policy arena," she says. "We are starting with what we can do on our own."

In addition to Itasca, these organizations are backing the initiative: Capital City Partnership, Minneapolis Downtown Council, Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce, St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, Minnesota Business Partnership and the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce.

The Brookings report defines three different kinds of disparities here: by race, by class and by place.

It found the "place" disparities mainly between the metro area's two central cities and their suburbs.

"Concentrated poverty — neighborhoods where the poverty rates are 40 percent or higher — is solely found in Minneapolis and St. Paul," the report says.

The report's emphasis on such differences underscores a return to concerns often voiced here in the early 1990s. Then, a Metropolitan Council report — "Trouble at the Core: The Twin Cities Under Stress" — spurred much discussion in public policy circles here.

Such talk faded as the decade wore on and the overall economy improved. But now, the issue is moving up on radar screens once again with urban sprawl increasing, investment continuing to pour into many suburbs and jitters about a tempering of the housing booms in the two central cities.

This time, the fact that so many business leaders have signed onto the concerns about city-suburban disparities as well as the race and class gaps suggests it might not go away anytime soon.

For more on this effort, including the tool kit and the Brookings report, see www.unitedwaytwincities.org/closethegap.cfm.

December 16, 2005

Closing the gap is not only right, it's smart

Minnesota is bad at absorbing minorities into mainstream.

We Minnesotans, perhaps more than most Americans, have high expectations for our home state. We are both defensive and proud that we've carved from this remote northern landscape a degree of civilization, and it's true that the state ranks high on all the usual lists that measure livability. We are, on the whole, healthy, wealthy and, if not wise, highly educated.

But among the few things we do not do well, one stands out as a particular embarrassment. We are bad at absorbing racial and ethnic minorities into the middle-class mainstream. To read the Brookings Institution's "Mind the Gap" report, featured in today's opinion pages, is to despair over the enormous chasm between whites and non-whites on household income, educational attainment, job opportunity, home ownership and other measures. The numbers (whites, for instance, earn *twice* as much money per household as blacks) resemble those you'd expect to find in the Deep South.

Indeed, the Twin Cities is now (by income) the nation's second most segregated metropolitan place; only Milwaukee's central city is more disproportionately poor and its suburbs more disproportionately rich. In Minnesota, Minneapolis and St. Paul carry almost alone the burdens of poverty and racial inequality -- a dangerous trend because, as sociologists have noted, nothing breeds intractable social problems, generation upon generation, like concentrations of poverty.

It must be stipulated that the gap may be inflated *temporarily* due to recent immigration, and that it will shrink as the next generation of Hmong, Hispanics, East Africans and others begin to find their way, as other groups have in the past. But that still leaves American Indians and far larger numbers of native-born blacks with chronic, long-term deficits. Unlike other cities, Minneapolis-St. Paul has not developed a large African-American middle class. Minnesotans can fairly argue about the roles that racism, "ghetto culture" and other factors have played, and what government might or might not do. But it's clear that for this state to sustain its past success, impoverished Minnesotans of color must move into the mainstream. The question is, how? Here are six suggestions:

- Focus relentlessly on urban education, even if it means changing radically the nature and variety of school structures and methods. The city systems must discover and attack the root causes of nonlearning, even if those causes are politically incorrect (a culture of victimhood, for example.) The traditional classroom that works so well for affluent children has failed miserably to give poorer children the chance they need. Preschool and K-14 should be the norm. While focusing on the poor, the city systems must also enhance their attractiveness to the middle class. When all those young condo owners decide to stay and raise families in Minneapolis, the city will have turned an important corner.
- Make college and job-training affordable and available. A college degree remains the best ticket to success and the single best indicator of metropolitan well-being.
- Remove the barriers that give suburbs unfair advantage over the central cities in attracting wealth and jobs. That means investing in transit and insisting on land-use reforms that make the redevelopment of urban neighborhoods a competitive alternative to sprawling ever deeper into the countryside. Sliding further toward the Detroit and St. Louis models of inner-city decay must be avoided at all cost.
- Engage business to act in its best long-term interest -- and that is to invest in human capital and to urge government to do the same. If low taxes are all that business wants, then the gap will widen and Minnesota will lose its competitive edge.

- Sustain public safety, health insurance and affordable housing as a way to help stabilize the disorganized lives of poor families.
- Find ways to give more autonomy and flexibility to Minneapolis and St. Paul. Minnesota's top-down power structure invites the mainstream suburban majority to turn its back on urban problems. That's self-destructive. Research shows clearly that suburban prospects rise and fall with the corresponding health of their inner cities. As the report says, "Reducing disparities is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do."

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Racial, economic disparities threaten region's economic growth by Brandt Williams

Researchers say the next generation of workers will be more diverse. But disparities in education and income are preventing people of color from getting the education and skills they need to perform jobs that are being vacated by retiring baby boomers. The authors of a new report released Thursday say the gap between the haves and have-nots living in the Twin Cities metro area threatens the economic viability of the entire region. Researchers with the Brookings Institution say the next generation of workers will be more racially and ethnically diverse than their predecessors. But they say too many of these young people lack the necessary education and skills to fill the jobs held by baby boomers who are reaching retirement age.

Generally speaking, the Twin Cities metro area has the building blocks of a strong economy -- low unemployment, low poverty and a highly skilled and educated workforce. But a closer examination shows a troubling trend.

According to data collected for a report titled "Mind the Gap," people of color in the Twin Cities have lower college attainment rates and lower household incomes than their white counterparts.

The report says that people of color tend to live farther away from areas where a growing number of jobs are being located. The data also shows that people of color will make up one-quarter of the next generation of workers.

The report was commissioned by the Itasca Project, a group of about 40 Twin Cities business leaders, academics and public officials. Members of the group say that not only is closing the gap the right thing to do, but it also makes good business sense.

"It's very clear to me, the connection between this work and the future of my own organization, and I know that other business leaders are looking at it the same way," says Mary Brainerd, chair of the Itasca Project's disparities task force. Brainerd is also the CEO of HealthPartners.

Brainerd uses the health care industry as one example, because it has already experienced a shortage in qualified workers.

"We had a shortage a few years ago of nurses," she says. "We know that the average age of a nurse is about 45 years old. And we know that it's not very many years down the road and we're going to be experiencing shortages again, unless we can make those professions attractive. But also, we need to have people who are educated to fill those roles."

Better education and training for young people of color are key to closing the gap, says Debbie Atterberry. She's the president of Resource, Inc., a nonprofit, human service agency that provides employment, mental health, chemical health, and career improvement services.

Atterberry also contributed to the disparities report. She says efforts to help youth of color succeed in school should also include their families.

"Many of our families of youth of color are suffering economically, and have basic needs that need to be addressed such as housing. Or it could be a food emergency in terms of not having enough food in the house," Atterberry says. "Or the parents in the household themselves may need assistance with employment."

Atterberry says there are other ways to curb the disparities, like upgrading the public transportation system so poor people concentrated in the inner cities can get to suburban jobs; spreading out affordable housing so people can live closer to where they work.

Atterberry says businesses and nonprofit groups should team up to provide more flexible training classes that help people working in lower wage jobs move up the ladder.

"Many individuals in those circumstances are supporting families. They have very little time to work on skill development, because they're trying to take care of their children and work at the same time," Atterberry says. "So, we should be looking at what short-term training programs we need, how those can be funded so that they are affordable for people."

Danielle McShann may be just the type of person Mary Brainerd at Healthpartners may want to hire someday. McShann is 24 and African-American. She has come to the Midway Workforce Center in St. Paul to find a job in customer service -- something accessible by bus, because she doesn't have a car.

"I went to college for medical coding, but I'm about to start up again for nursing. I want to be a nurse," she says.

McShann adds that she's looking for a job to help her pay for nursing school and to help her take care of her son.

The Itasca Project report also includes some basic elements to reducing disparities, like providing adequate health care, education and public safety for all residents; working to close the wealth gap and to make sure the remedies are done on a regional scale.

New Report Explores Disparities

R.T. Ryback

According to a new report, disparities among race and ethnic groups, among income levels, and between cities and suburbs are accelerating at a time when the Twin Cities' most-productive workers are thinking about retiring - a situation that could threaten the entire metro area's economic leadership in the coming years.

A major study, "Mind the Gap: Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities," by Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institution was released this week by the Itasca Project, a group of approximately 40 Twin Cities-based CEOs, academic leaders and public officials who focus attention and action on the region's most pressing competitive threats. As your Mayor, I am proud to be a part of the Itasca Project and was very active in the committee that helped direct this project.

According to Brookings, the Twin Cities is headed towards a workforce shortage as baby boomers - many of whom are college educated - begin to retire. If population projections hold over that period of time, these retirees will be replaced with a more diverse workforce, many of whom will not have the same skill or education levels as their predecessors. This means the next generation of workers will be less prepared for the jobs that Twin Cities employers will require.

The Twin Cities region is blessed with assets that make it an exceptionally strong region, according to the study. It has one of the most highly educated populations in the country, its job and income growth outpaced the nation for the last decade, and its poverty rate is among the nation's lowest. But the Twin Cities also has the second-largest gap in the nation between poverty in its central cities and poverty in its suburbs.

To help close these disparities gaps, the Itasca Project plans to:

- Distribute the Brookings "Mind the Gap" report broadly via the internet and in hard copy.
- Distribute an employer tool kit with practical actions that businesses of any size can take advantage of to help reduce disparities in their workplace.
- Train a speakers bureau, managed by Greater Twin Cities United Way that will take the disparities conversation to a broader community.
- Institute a regional monitoring system to measure the Twin Cities' efforts to close these disparities gaps.

The Minnesota Private College Council is a non-profit organization representing 17 private, four-year liberal arts colleges in Minnesota.

Higher Education Vital to Minnesota's Future

Minnesota's Private Colleges appear to be gaining support for their view that Minnesota's economy could be adversely affected unless policymakers offer greater support for Minnesota's higher education enterprise.

In a recent report issued by the Brookings Institution and sponsored by a number of key business and community organizations, findings concluded that growing socioeconomic disparities may threaten our state's continued economic vitality.

In conclusions strikingly parallel to those of Minnesota's Private Colleges, the study, entitled *Mind the Gap*, said that it is in the business community's best interest to support policies designed to narrow the gap in income, healthcare and education between those in our region who are prospering and those who are not, including Minnesota's minority groups.

The study — and a call to action — were presented at a Minneapolis forum attended by approximately three hundred business leaders in mid-November. Called *Closing the Gap* and jointly sponsored by the Twin Cities United Way and The Itasca Project, the forum presentation included the study findings and urged action to assure a capable workforce in the years ahead.

According to Brookings' Deputy Director Amy Liu, metropolitan areas with high levels of income inequality tend to have lower levels of overall income growth. She said addressing disparities "will fundamentally strengthen the Twin Cities economy" and increase the size and quality of the workforce.

Research undertaken independently by the Minnesota Private College Research Foundation also suggests the urgent need to improve educational attainment for Minnesota's growing minority groups in order to produce the educated workforce necessary to sustain our economic vitality.

That research found that within the next four years job growth will begin to outpace Minnesota's production of baccalaureates. It also indicated that by 2017, our economy will be producing nearly 15,000 more jobs than there are graduates to fill. Minnesota's Private Colleges have initiated a public engagement campaign that hopes to ignite public discourse on the subject through public events and advertising beginning in the spring of 2006

"We share many of the Brookings' study concerns and look forward to the possibility of partnering with the Itasca Project effort," said Amy Sunderland, senior vice president of the Minnesota Private College Council. "The statistical relationship between education and income is crystal clear. From our vantage point, we see support for minority access to higher education as a core means by which we can, indeed, close the gap."

'Gap' package left out some key factors

By Mitch Pearlstein

Surely, crime and out-of-wedlock births play important roles in the inequality being observed in the Twin Cities.

Imagine two groups. In the first, 78.6 percent of all babies come into this world outside of marriage. In the second group, "only" 15.9 percent of boys and girls do so. Now, based on these two simple but critical pieces of data, consider a basic question.

Given that homes in which children born out of wedlock generally contain fewer adults of working age than do homes in which both parents live, is it realistic to assume that "household" incomes in the former group, on average, could even begin to rival the household incomes of the latter group? Of course not, is the only answer, as two potential income earners, on average, will always make more money than only one person. This is true by definition. Nonetheless, there isn't a single acknowledgment of this statistical fact of life in the Star Tribune's Opinion Exchange package on income, racial and other sobering gaps in the Twin Cities (Dec. 18).

The first and much larger number above (78.6 percent) refers to the percentage of "live births to unmarried women" among African-Americans in Hennepin County in 2003. The second number (15.9 percent) refers to the percentage of such births to white residents the same year.

Hugely disparate data like these would seem to suggest that out-of-wedlock births and the evaporation of marriage are profound problems, and that if we have any hope of reducing income and other chasms between whites and communities of color in Minnesota, we must address all causes foursquare, including these. Yet how many times do you think the word "marriage" or anything akin to it appeared in the editorial and two columns? Not once.

The nonmarital birth rate for Hennepin County as a whole in 2003 was 29.9: 22.9 percent for Asians; 54.2 percent for Hispanics, and 83.4 percent for American Indians. These numbers are also informative in the matter of income and other differences between and among groups.

Now imagine just a single group, one in which an excruciating 44 percent of all young men between ages 18 and 30 were arrested in a recent year (1999). Given the often catastrophic effects of police records on future earnings, marital prospects and other facets of life, is it realistic to believe that members of such a group, on average, will wind up doing nearly as well as their statewide neighbors? Of course not, again, is only the answer.

But how many times do you think the word "crime," or any comment about the imperative need for criminal behavior to fall markedly, appeared in the three pieces? Zero. The demographic group in question here, once more and sadly, is African-Americans living in Hennepin County. The extraordinary figure of 44 percent is from the often remarkably candid 2002 report of the county's African-American Men Project.

The Star Tribune is right to cringe that the Twin Cities is the second-most segregated metropolitan area in the nation, as measured by income. But there is not a chance in the world such inequalities will be adequately reduced until we come to grips -- with no less courage than grace -- with all the reasons for our troubles and civic embarrassment, not just the ones that are comparatively easy and safe to talk about.

November 1, 2005

Assessing the cost of state's deferred maintenance

In Minnesota, where state government leadership has not sought after centrist solutions for too long, solid policy studies by serious people are backing up with no apparent place to go. This unproductive phenomenon comes to mind again with the release of the Itasca Project's report warning that racial, class and city-suburban inequalities can erode the region's economic strength.

The problem isn't a lack of understanding. The roadblocks to addressing structural social and economic problems adequately before they degrade Minnesota's future are problems of public leadership in a highly partisan environment.

The effective remedies lie not in generating more studies, but in a public deciding next November whom to send to the Capitol. The entire Legislature and all state constitutional offices are up in 2006.

Like the abundant transportation and early childhood education studies in the last few years, the Itasca Project's research, done by Brookings Institution scholars, echoes what other distinguished voices have said. The common theme among the prominent research, including by the Minnesota Private College Research Foundation, is that documented achievement gaps in education bode ill for Minnesota to nurture a home-grown work force of sufficient skill to maintain that state's position of economic strength.

"Mind the Gap: Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities," does have prescriptives useful for business decision-makers, the core constituency of the business-led Itasca Project. The project assembled excellent leadership for its Project Disparities Task Force from across the public and private sectors, and their perspectives show in the result.

The work also can be valuable internally with both measurements of the problems and suggestions to business executives on how to address the gaps. Taking responsibility without government is much to be applauded. However, overarching education and economic policy questions need government to be engaged, not endlessly warring among its parties and factions.

In the current political environment, Minnesota takes baby steps on problems that require Paul Bunyan-sized strides. There's broad consensus that ramping up early childhood education is essential. But resources come in ribs and drabs. There's broad consensus that the metro transportation system needs bigger fixes, but the politics of taxes and transportation mean incrementalism prevails. There's a game of political hot potato going on in public education finance.

In such an environment, the long-term questions get pushed back. Studies of the problems do remind both the public and the public leadership that there are reasonable courses of action to improve Minnesota's prospects of staying a brainpower state with high-wage jobs and competitive businesses. It's up to the voters next year to ask candidates what they'll do about deferred maintenance on Minnesota's quality of life that is so well studied and so inadequately attended to.